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NSC BRIEFING

3 December 1953

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SUDANESE ELECTIONS

Decisive victory of pro-Egyptian National Unionist Party, which won 54 out of 97 seats in first but major phase of move toward Sudanese self-government, is strong slap at British administration rather than wholehearted endorsement of union with Egypt. It creates a new problem for Sudan and may complicate settlement of Suez issue.

I. British Administrative Problems

A. Election results, according to first reports from Khartoum, have discouraged local British officials. Foreign Office London expects possibly large number British resignations from Sudan political service.

B. Umma Party in past has generally cooperated with British. It only won 22 seats out of 97.

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C. Umma claimed before election that it controlled 70 percent of the population of black South. Its leaders now call fraud and threaten boycott. Election under international Election Commission reasonably honest.

D. Clear, however, that Umma failed to measure up to pre-election hopes because it is tarred with collaboration with British.

E. Anti-British sentiment appears to have been determining factor in surprise vote which ran up to about 50 percent of eligible electorate.

F. British administration in next three years of preparation for Sudanese independence faces administrative difficulties in an area where rising tide of opposition is clearly established.

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II. Egypt's Position

A. Vote, which is loudly hailed in Cairo, not really pro-union but anti-British.

B. Egypt actually created National Unity Party in October 1952 out of five smaller Sudanese parties. Gave direct moral and financial support, latter aspect fairly well hidden.

C. Egyptian leaders frequently visited Sudan before elections. General Nagib, half Sudanese, is locally popular.

D. Sudanese leaders given junket tours to Cairo.

E. Egypt may be expected to intensify various efforts in Sudan, especially theme of British colonialism and imperialism.

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F. Egypt, however, can offer little to Sudan.

1. Egyptian administrators generally bad.
2. Egypt and Sudan compete for long-fiber cotton markets of world.
3. Any Egyptian use of Sudan as population outlet would result in strong Sudanese opposition.

III. Developments Anticipated Inside Sudan

A. Sudan faces complex problems inherent in premature self-government:

1. Over 98 percent population illiterate.
2. Almost no administrative or political experience.
3. Basic division of country between Arabic-speaking Moslems of North and primitive non-Moslem black tribes of South.

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B. Parliamentary problems:

1. Newly formed coalition gives no promise of furnishing needed leadership.

2. Intraparty quarrels and breakup distinct possibility.

3. Deep-seated political and religious antagonism between Ali Mirghani, top figure in National Unionist Party, and Mahdi, head of Umma Party, likely to create serious friction and flare-up in public disorder.

4. Newly elected parliament certain to face hectic and confused situation.

C. Heavy Egyptian propaganda on imperialism dangerous and unknown factor.

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IV. Possible Impact on Suez Dispute

A. British reaction:

1. Officially in past weeks Eden twice charged Egypt with interfering in elections.

2. No official reaction as yet to election outcome.

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B. Egyptian Position

1. Egypt, under Nagib's inspiration, has publicly stated it is ready to proceed to Suez settlement. At present might possibly make some concession.

2. Unyielding British attitude will quickly result in tough Egyptian reaction bolstered by sense of victory in Sudan.

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